

Delaware's Parks and Recreation Council votes to raise surf-fishing permit fees for 2019 season

DNREC to cap number of annual surf-fishing permits issued at 17,000

DOVER – Delaware's Parks and Recreation Council, which advises DNREC's Division of Parks & Recreation, today voted to raise surf fishing permit fees this year and to limit the number of permits issued annually to no more than 17,000. Both decisions were made at a regularly-scheduled Parks and Recreation Advisory Council meeting, for which the council had received written comments in advance about the two issues voted on. Over 100 individuals and organizations submitted written comments ahead of the meeting, while about 20 people commented to the council before the vote was taken.

When the approved changes to the surf-fishing program go into effect Feb. 1, yearly surf fishing permit fees will be increased from \$80 to \$90 for Delaware residents, while out-of-state residents will pay \$180 for the annual surf fishing permit, up \$20 from 2018 fees. Surf-fishing permit holders will continue to receive the additional benefit of their permit serving as an annual parks pass, providing access to all 17 of DNREC's Delaware's state parks.

The fee increase is intended to help ensure public safety, and to continue improving the quality user experience for Delaware State Parks' visitors, including surf-fishing permit holders, at designated multi-use beaches. Limiting the number of permits will enable more efficient management of the state's surf-fishing program, said Division of Parks & Recreation

Director Ray Bivens. The fee increase also aligns with DNREC's priority to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all visitors to Delaware's award-winning state parks system, he said.

The most common public comment received by DNREC on the surf-fishing program was the request for more enforcement of current surf-fishing rules and regulations. At the meeting, the Division of Parks & Recreation presented findings demonstrating a three-fold increase in the last year for violations of the "actively-engaged in surf fishing" rule. The Division of Parks & Recreation also announced at the meeting the addition of a new full-time Delaware Natural Resources Police Park Ranger for the region and expansion of Rangers' work week from 37.5 to 40 hours, creating 1,000 hours of expanded coverage annually for the coastal parks. "The 'actively-engaged' rule will continue to be a priority area for targeted enforcement in the future," said Parks & Recreation Director Bivens.

Regarding the cap on annual permits, another presentation made at today's meeting showed that the issuing of surf-fishing permits has increased at a rate of seven percent annually from 2011-2017. "Implementing a first-come, first-served cap on the number of permits issued is the best way to be equitable to all beach users, to manage a limited resource, and to protect against overcrowding our beaches in the future," Bivens said.

Sixty-five percent of the funds used to operate and maintain the parks come from the collection of user fees. Revenue generated by the new fee increase will advance the Division of Parks & Recreation's efforts to improve increase enforcement efforts, improve amenities and better educate parks' visitors on the state's multi-use beaches.

The authority to increase park user fees is included in Section 87 of the FY2019 bond bill, and requires "adequate opportunity for public comment and approval of the appropriate

public advisory council.” The Parks and Recreation Council is an 11-member board, appointed by the Governor that serves in an advisory capacity to DNREC’s Division of Parks & Recreation.

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